THE AROUND VIEWS

THE SMALLEST DEED IS BETTER THAN THE GREATEST INTENTION — JOHN BURROUGHS

TIMOTHEE CHALAMET TEASES 1ST LOOK OF HIS PORTRAYAL OF ICONIC CHARACTER WILLY WONKA IN UPCOMING FILM

PINK NAMED UK'S MOST-PLAYED FEMALE ARTIST OF 21ST CENTURY BY A MUSIC LICENCING COMPANY

In Doha, Taliban foreign min calls for good ties with world

But Refuses To Commit To Girls' Education Despite Int'l Pressure

Doha: Afghanistan's foreign minister appealed to the world for good relations on Monday but avoided making firm commitments on girls' education despite international demands to allow all Afghan children to go back to school. Almost two months after the insurgent forces swept into Kabul, the new Taliban administration has pushed to build relations with other countries to help stave off a catastrophic economic crisis. "The international community need to start cooperating with us," acting foreign minister Amir Khan Muttaqi said in Doha. "With this we will be able to stop insecurity and at the same time with this we'll be able to engage positively with the world."

But the Taliban have so far refused to give ground on allowing girls to return to high school, one of the key demands of the international community after a decision last month that schools above the sixth grade would only reopen for boys. Muttaqi said the Taliban's Islamic Emirate government was moving carefully but had only been in power for a few weeks and could not be expected to complete reforms the international community had not been able to implement in 30 years. "They had a lot of financial resources and they had a international backing but you are asking us to do all the reforms in two months?" he said.

The new administration has come under sustained criticism for its approach to girls' education, considered one of the limited number of unambiguously positive gains from the West's two decades of involvement in Afghanistan. UN secretary general Antonio Guterres said Taliban had broken promises on guaranteeing rights for women and girls and there was no way the economy could be fixed if women were barred from work.

Muttaqi repeated calls for the US to lift a block on over $9 billion of Afghan central bank reserves held outside the country. He said Taliban forces had full control of the country and were able to control the threat from Islamic State militants who have claimed a series of deadly attacks in recent weeks, including last week's bombing at a Shia mosque in the city of Kunduz. "The Daesh issue has been controlled by the Islamic Emirate very well so far," he said using a derogatory term for the radical Sunni group but adding that international pressure on the government was helping Islamic State's morale. REUTERS

UN secretary general Antonio Guterres said Taliban had broken promises on guaranteeing rights for women and girls and there was no way the economy could be fixed if women were barred from work. AFP

'Taliban to meet EU officials today'

A Taliban delegation will meet EU representatives in Doha on Tuesday, acting foreign minister Amir Khan Muttaqi said. The Afghans have already met with German government officials and a British parliamentarian, he said on Monday. "Tomorrow we are meeting the EU representatives. We're having positive meetings with representatives of other countries," he said on Monday. "We want positive ties with the whole world." AFP

US to give humanitarian aid to Af: Taliban

The US has agreed to provide humanitarian aid to Afghanistan on the brink of an economic disaster, while refusing to give political recognition to the country's new rulers, the Taliban said. The statement came at the end of the first direct talks between the former foes since the withdrawal of US troops in August. The US statement was less definitive, saying only that the two sides "discussed the US' provision of robust humanitarian assistance, directly to the Afghan people". The Taliban said on Sunday the talks held in Doha "went well," with US ton freeing up humanitarian aid to Afghanistan after agreeing not to link such assistance to recognition of the Taliban. The US made it clear that the talks were in no way a preamble to recognition of the Taliban. State department spokesman Ned Price called the discussions "candid and professional", with the US side reiterating that Taliban will be judged on their actions. AP

Iraq says it has arrested Islamic State's 'finance chief'

Baghdad: Iraq said on Monday it has detained a top leader of the Islamic State group and a longtime al-Qaida operative in a cross-border operation. Iraqi PM Mustafa al-Kadhimi tweeted the news, identifying the man as Sami Jasim, who oversees the IS group's financial operations and served as the deputy leader of IS under the late Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Al-Kadhimi described it as "one of the most difficult" cross border intelligence operations ever conducted by Iraqi forces. A senior Iraqi military source told AFP that Jasim was arrested in Turkey, with giving any details.

Jasim has a $5 million bounty on his head from the US state department's Rewards for Justice programme, which describes him as having been "instrumental in managing finances for IS terrorist operations". "While serving as IS deputy in southern Mosul in 2014, Jasim reportedly served as the equivalent of IS's finance minister, supervising the group's revenue-generating operations from illicit sales of oil, gas, antiquities, and minerals," the website says. Iraqi Intelligence officials said that Jasim was detained in an identified foreign country and transported to Iraq few days ago. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak of the operation on the record. Jasim worked with al-Qaida in Iraq leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian militant who was killed in a US airstrike in Iraq in 2006. He assumed various security positions in Iraq, and moved to Syria in 2015, after the Islamic State group, an al-Qaida offshoot, declared its caliphate in 2014 and became the deputy of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the extremist group's leader. AP

Trio's research made economics more applicable to everyday life

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The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences said the three have "completely reshaped empirical work in the economic sciences." Together, the three helped rapidly expand the use of "natural experiments," or studies based on the observation of real-world data. Such research made economics more applicable to everyday life, provided policymakers with actual evidence on the outcomes of policies, and in time spawned a more popular approach to economics epitomised by the blockbuster bestseller "Freakonomics", by Stephen Dubner and Steven Levitt.

In a study published in 1993, Card looked at what happened to jobs at fast-food restaurants Burger King, KFC, Wendy's and Roy Rogers when New Jersey raised its minimum wage from $4.25 to $5.05, using restaurants in bordering eastern Pennsylvania as the control — or comparison — group. Contrary to previous studies, he and his late research partner Alan Krueger found that an increase in the minimum wage had no effect on the number of employees. Card's minimum wage research fundamentally altered economists' views of such policies.

Their findings sparked interest in further research into why a higher minimum wouldn't reduce employment. One conclusion was that companies are able to pass on the cost of higher wages to customers by raising prices. In other cases, if a company is a major employer in a particular area, it may be able to keep wages particularly low, so that it could afford to pay a higher minimum, when required to do so, without cutting jobs. The higher pay would also attract more applicants, boosting labour supply. "That really surprising evidence on the impact of the minimum wage has shaken up the field at a very fundamental level," said Arindrajit Dube, an economics professor at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, who has duplicated and broadened Card and Krueger's research. "And so for that reason, and all the following research that their work ignited, this is a richly deserved award." Krueger would almost certainly have shared in the award, Dube said, but the economics Nobel isn't awarded posthumously.

Card also found that an influx of immigrants into a city doesn't cost native workers jobs or lower their earnings, though earlier immigrants can be negatively affected. Card studied the labour market in Miami in the wake of Cuba's sudden decision to let people emigrate in 1980, leading 1,25,000 people to leave in what became known as the Mariel Boatlift. It resulted in a 7% increase in the city's workforce. By comparing the evolution of wages and employment in four other cities, Card discovered no negative effects for Miami residents with low levels of education. Follow-up work showed that increased immigration can have a positive impact on income for people born in the country. Angrist and Imbens won their half of the award for working out the methodological issues that allow economists to draw solid conclusions about cause and effect even where they cannot carry out studies according to strict scientific methods. AP

THE WINNERS: (From L) David Card, Joshua Angrist & Guido Imbens. Card was awarded one half of the prize for his research on how minimum wage, immigration and education affect the labour market. The other half was shared by Angrist and Imbens for their framework for studying issues that can't rely on traditional scientific methods

Only one woman won a Nobel in 2021

Only one woman was awarded a Nobel Prize this year, out of 13 laureates. Journalist Maria Ressa of the Philippines shared the Nobel Peace Prize with Russia's Dmitry Muratov. While that's better than the record in 2016 and 2017 when women won no awards at all, it is still lower than the average for the last decade. Four women won Nobel prizes in 2020 — close to the 2009 record of five. In 2019, there was only one woman laureate. Between 1901 and 2021, the Nobel prizes have been awarded to 58 women, with Marie Curie having won two awards, for physics in 1903 and for chemistry in 1911. This compares with 885 male laureates and 25 organisations that have won the prize. The economics prize, which has been awarded since 1969, has been won by women only twice, in 2009 and 2019. AGENCIES

Pak PM urges world to engage with Taliban

Omer Farooq Khan | TNN

Islamabad: Pakistan PM Imran Khan on Monday once again urged the international community to engage with the Afghan Taliban to avoid the country from becoming a fertile ground for terrorist groups like the Islamic State. In a wide-ranging interview with the "Middle East Eye", Khan spoke on the current situation in Afghanistan, Kashmir, relations with the US, and allegations against China regarding the treatment of Uighurs.

On Afghanistan, the PM warned of the consequences if the international community failed to engage with the Taliban. "There must be hardliners within the group and it can easily go back to the Taliban of 20 years ago. And that would be a disaster," he warned. "It would become a fertile ground for terrorists like IS...," he said. The US, Khan suggested, has to "pull itself together" from the shock it had suffered after the withdrawal of forces from Afghanistan. "I don't think they have found their feet as yet," he said. He also derided the US policy of conducting drone attacks in its efforts to fight terrorism, calling it the "most insane" method. When asked whether he would allow US bases in Pakistan for action against IS, the PM said: "I think they don't need a base here because we don't want to be a part of conflict again."

About the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, he said Islamabad has been trying to speak to elements within the TTP who can be reconciled "because it's from a position of strength". He pointed out that the Afghan Taliban had assured Islamabad that they would not let Afghanistan's soil be used against any country. He alleged that the previous Afghan government had facilitated Indian agencies in carrying out terrorist attacks on Pakistan.

On his silence about the treatment of Uighurs in China, Khan said he considered "selective pronouncements on human rights" to be immoral. He said Pakistan had spoken to China about the Uighur issue and had been provided with an explanation. "Our relationship with China is such that we have an understanding between us. We will talk to each other, but behind closed doors..."

He soon changed the topic by asking the two interviewers why there was no criticism of alleged Indian actions in Kashmir. When asked how volatile the current situation with India was, Khan replied: "If you look at the flash-points, probably the nuclear flashpoint right now in the world is Pakistan-India because nowhere else is there a situation where there are two nuclear-armed countries who have had three wars before they were nuclear-armed." "We have not had a war since then because of the deterrent," he said. Still, he admitted that dealing with the flare-up in 2019 in the early months of his premiership had been a nervous and dangerous time.

China carries out beach landing drills near Taiwan

Beijing: China's military said on Monday it had carried out beach landing and assault drills in the province directly across the sea from Taiwan, though it did not link the exercises to current tensions with Taipei. Democratically-ruled Taiwan, claimed by China as its own territory, has complained of stepped-up military and political pressure from Beijing to force it to accept Chinese rule, including massed air force incursions into Taiwan's air defence identification zone.

The official People's Liberation Army Daily newspaper, in a brief report on its Weibo microblogging account, said the drills had been carried out "in recent days" in the southern part of Fujian province. The action had involved "shock" troops, snipers and boat specialists, the military paper added. The troops were "divided into multiple waves to grab the beach and perform combat tasks at different stages", it added, without providing further details. It showed a video of soldiers in boats storming a beach, throwing smoke grenades, breaking through barbed wire defences and digging trenches in the sand. The drills appeared to involve a small number of troops.

The weather was clear and the seas were calm — suggesting the drill did not happen on Monday as southern Fujian is currently being affected by a tropical storm. Fujian would be a key launching site for any Chinese invasion of Taiwan due to its geographical proximity.

China routinely carries out military exercises up and down its coast as well as in the disputed South China Sea. Taiwan has denounced what it calls China's coercive tactics against it and says it'll defend itself if attacked. Over the weekend, Chinese President Xi Jinping reiterated a vow to "reunify" Taiwan, and Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen said Taiwan will not be forced to bow to China. REUTERS

Merck applies for emergency approval for what would be the first pill to treat Covid

Merck said on Monday that it had submitted an application to the US Food and Drug Administration to authorise what would be the first antiviral pill to treat Covid. An approval for the drug, molnupiravir, would be a milestone in the fight against the coronavirus, experts said, because a convenient, relatively inexpensive treatment could reach many more high-risk people sick with Covid than the cumbersome antibody treatments currently being used.

The Biden administration is preparing for an authorisation that could come within weeks. If approved, the pill is likely to be allocated to states, as was the case with the vaccines. States could then distribute the pills how they wish, administration officials said.

If the pill wins authorisation, tens of millions of Americans will most likely be eligible to take it if they got sick with Covid — many more than the supply could cover, at least initially. The federal government has placed an advance order for enough pills for 1.7 million Americans, at a price of about $700 per patient. That is about one-third the price that the government is paying for the monoclonal antibody treatments, which are generally given via intravenous infusion.

Merck expects to be able to produce enough pills for 10 million people by the end of the year. Governments have raced to lock up supplies since the strong trial results were released this month; Australia, Malaysia, Singapore and South Korea have announced deals.

An antiviral pill being developed by Pfizer and one from Atea Pharmaceuticals-Roche will report study results in the next months and, if effective, could expand supply. Merck's pill is meant to be taken at home as four capsules twice a day for five days, for a total of 40 pills. It halved hospitalisations and deaths in a trial that enrolled unvaccinated adults who had begun showing Covid symptoms within the previous five days and were at high risk for bad outcomes from the disease.

Merck said it was seeking authorisation for its pill to be given only to high-risk adults, which in the clinical trial was most commonly people over 60 or younger people with obesity, diabetes or heart disease. NYT

OZ STARTS TRANSITION FROM ZERO COVID TO LIVING WITH VIRUS: Sydney's cafes, gyms and restaurants welcomed back fully vaccinated customers on Monday after nearly four months of lockdown, as Australia aims to begin living with the coronavirus and gradually reopen with high rates of inoculation. 'I see it as a day of freedom...' New South Wales Premier Dominic Perrottet told reporters in Sydney

Most NZ healthcare workers, teachers told 'no jab, no job'

New Zealand announced Monday a sweeping "no jab, no job" policy for most healthcare workers and teachers. "We can't leave anything to chance so that's why we're making it mandatory," said Covid response minister Chris Hipkins. Doctors, nurses and other frontline workers must be double-jabbed by December 1 while everyone who has contact with students must have their two doses by January 1. AP

Pak journo killed in bomb attack in Balochistan

Karachi: A 35-year-old Pakistani journalist was killed in an attack claimed to have been carried out by the banned Balochistan Liberation Army in the country's restive Balochistan province, media reports said on Monday. Shahid Zehri, who has been associated with Metro 1 News, was travelling in a car in the town of Hub when he was attacked on Sunday, reportedly with a homemade grenade, police officer Nadeem Haider was quoted as saying by Dawn News. Zehri critical injuries in the blast, the report said.

CCTV footage of the incident showed the blast that took place near Zehri's car as it made a U-turn on a busy road. The nature of the bomb could not be confirmed. The banned Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) claimed responsibility for the attack. In February, the Council of Pakistan Newspaper Editors' Media Freedom Report revealed that at least 10 journalists were murdered and several others kidnapped, tortured and arrested in Pakistan on trumped-up charges in 2020 alone, the Dawn report said. PTI

Record low turnout suggests that vote to oust Iraq's elite will leave them in power

Baghdad: Shia Muslim cleric Moqtada al-Sadr's party was the biggest winner in an Iraqi election on Monday, increasing the number of seats he holds in parliament, according to initial results, officials and a spokesperson for the Sadrist Movement. Former PM Nouri al-Maliki looked set to have the next largest win among Shia parties, initial results showed.

Iraq's Shia groups have dominated governments and government formation since the US-led invasion of 2003. Sunday's election was held several months early, in response to mass protests in 2019 that toppled a government and showed widespread anger against politicians whom many Iraqis say have enriched themselves at the expense of the country.

But a record low turnout suggested that a vote billed as an chance to wrest control from the ruling elite would do little to dislodge sectarian religious parties in power since 2003. A count based on initial results from several provinces plus the capital Baghdad, verified by local government officials, suggested Sadr had won over 70 seats, which if confirmed could give him considerable influence in forming a government.

However, Sadr's group is just one of several that will have to enter negotiations to form a coalition capable of dominating parliament and forming an administration, a period of jockeying for position that may take weeks or longer. Sadr broadcast a live speech on state TV claiming victory and promising a nationalist government free of foreign interference. "We welcome all embassies that do not interfere in Iraq's internal affairs," he said, adding that celebrations would take place in the streets "without weapons".

The unpredictable populist cleric has been a dominant figure and often kingmaker in Iraqi politics since the US invasion. He opposes all foreign interference in Iraq, whether by the US, against which he fought an insurgency after 2003, or by neighbouring Iran, which he has criticised for its close involvement in Iraqi politics. REUTERS

AROUND THE WORLD

Germany unveils first automated, driverless train

Reuters

German rail operator Deutsche Bahn and industrial group Siemens on Monday unveiled the world's first automated, driverless train in the city of Hamburg, billing it as more punctual and energy efficient than traditional trains. Four such trains will join the city's S-Bahn rapid urban rail network and start carrying passengers from December, using the existing rail infrastructure. Other cities like Paris have driverless metros while airports often have automated monorail trains plying terminals, but those run on exclusive single tracks while the Hamburg train will be sharing tracks with other regular trains. The project, which Siemens and Deutsche Bahn called a "world first", is part of a €60 million ($70 million) modernisation of Hamburg's rapid urban rail system. Deutsche Bahn CEO Richard Lutz said automated trains offer "a more reliable" service "without having to lay a single kilometre of new track". "We are making rail transport more intelligent," said Siemens CEO Roland Busch, estimating that automated trains can transport "up to 30% more passengers, significantly improve punctuality and save more than 30% energy". Although the train is controlled through digital technology and fully automated, a driver will still be present to supervise journeys.

LIFE'S A BEACH: A sculpture titled 'Couple Under An Umbrella' is displayed at Thaddaeus Ropac gallery in London on Monday

Superman comes out, as DC ushers in new Man of Steel

NYT

NEW PATH: Jonathan Kent, the new Superman, who is the son of Clark Kent and Lois Lane, shares a kiss with his friend Jay

George Gene Gustines

Up, up and out of the closet! The new Superman, Jonathan Kent — who is the son of Clark Kent and Lois Lane — will soon begin a romantic relationship with a male friend, DC Comics announced on Monday.

That same-sex relationship is just one of the ways that Jonathan is proving to be a different Superman than his father. Since his new series, Superman: Son of Kal-El, began in July, Jon has combated wildfires caused by climate change, thwarted a school shooting and protested the deportation of refugees in Metropolis.

"The idea of replacing Clark with another straight white savior felt like a missed opportunity," Tom Taylor, who writes the series, said. He added that a "new Superman had to have new fights — real world problems — that he could stand up to". The coming out of Superman, perhaps the most archetypal American superhero, is a notable moment even in an age when many comics have embraced diversity. Batman's sidekick, Robin, recently acknowledged romantic feelings for a male friend. And a new Aquaman comic stars a gay black man who is positioned to become the title hero. Though Superman is not the first LGBTQ hero, experts said there was something particularly momentous about Superman coming out. "It's not Northstar, who your aunt has never heard of," said Glen Weldon, the author of "Superman: The Unauthorized Biography". "It's not Hulkling. It is Superman. That counts for something — just in terms of visibility."

There has been some blowback. In August, as rumours about the Superman development began to circulate, a commenter on one website said "Marvel and DC have ruined their characters to please the woke mob." But others have cheered the news: "It's nice to see queer superheroes," another wrote. NYT